12

ROYALS

THE LAST STAND OF THE LAST INHUMANS!

EWING
LIBRANDA
RODRIGUEZ
LÓPEZ
VILLARRUBIA
BELLAIRE

EXPERIMENTED UPON LONG AGO BY ALIENS KNOWN AS THE KREE, *THE INHUMANS* ARE A RACE OF SUPER-BEINGS WHO CAN UNLOCK AMAZING ABILITIES VIA THE MYSTERIOUS ELEMENT *TERRIGEN*.

BUT AFTER LEARNING THAT TERRIGEN WAS POISONING EARTH'S MUTANT POPULATION, THE QUEEN OF THE INHUMANS, *MEDUSA*, DESTROYED ALL TRACES OF IT, MEANING THERE WILL BE NO MORE NEW INHUMANS. HEAVY WITH GUILT, MEDUSA ABDICATED THE THRONE—LEAVING THE INHUMANS WITHOUT THEIR ROYAL FAMILY.

BUT EVEN IF THE ROYALS CAN NO LONGER RULE INHUMANITY...THEY CAN STILL SAVE IT.

ROYALS

MEDUSA

MAXIMUS

CRYSTAL

GORGON

SWAIN

MARVEL BOY

FLINT

HEADSHOT ART BY JUAN DOE

MARVEL BOY RECRUITED THE ROYAL FAMILY AND A COUPLE OF NEW INHUMANS TO FIND A WAY TO RESTORE THE INHUMAN RACE. THEY BEGAN SEARCHING FOR PRIMAGEN, THE TERRIGEN-LIKE CATALYST THAT MADE THE KREE, AND ITS MAKERS. THE HUNT BROUGHT THE ROYALS TO THE SKYSPEARS; AFTER TOUCHING ONE OF THE ADVANCED COMPUTERS, FLINT'S POWERS EXPANDED, BUT HIS BODY IS NOW CRYSTALIZING.

THE SKYSPEARS LED THEM TO THE COMPUTER-BASED HOMEWORLD OF THE PRIMAGEN'S MAKERS, THE INCREDIBLY POWERFUL PROGENITORS—BUT THEY WERE NOTICED. IN THE ENSUING FIGHT, CRYSTAL WAS INJURED, AND MARVEL BOY BURNED TO A BARELY ALIVE CRISP. SURROUNDED BY A HORDE OF PROGENITORS, GORGON USED A SAMPLE OF PRIMAGEN TO BOOST HIS POWERS, THEN SACRIFICED HIMSELF TO ALLOW THE OTHERS TO ESCAPE.

THE DECISION BROKE MEDUSA'S HEART. BUT DUTY REMAINS—AND NOW, THANKS TO THE PRIMAGEN THEY STOLE, THE INHUMANS HAVE A FUTURE.

IF THE ROYALS CAN MAKE IT BACK TO EARTH, THAT IS.

FIVE THOUSAND YEARS IN THE FUTURE, THE PROGENITORS HAVE RETURNED. THE MOON KING (FLINT), THE ACCUSER (MARVEL BOY) AND THE LAST INHUMAN (MAXIMUS THE MAD) ARE THE EARTH'S FINAL DEFENSE.

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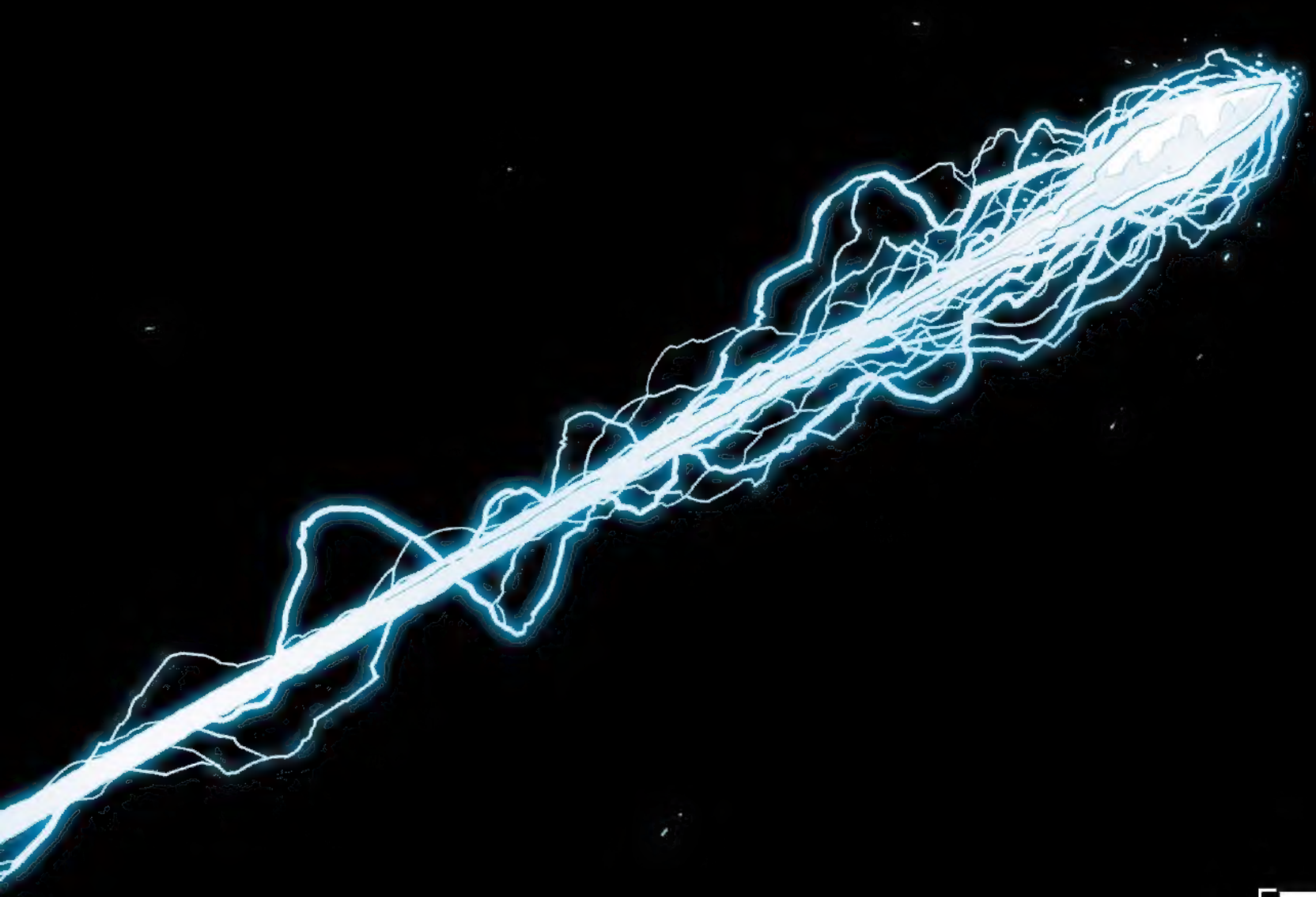
NOW.

A SINGLE DROP OF HEAVENLY CRYSTAL FLIES THROUGH THE ENDLESS DARK.

IT HOLDS WONDERS.

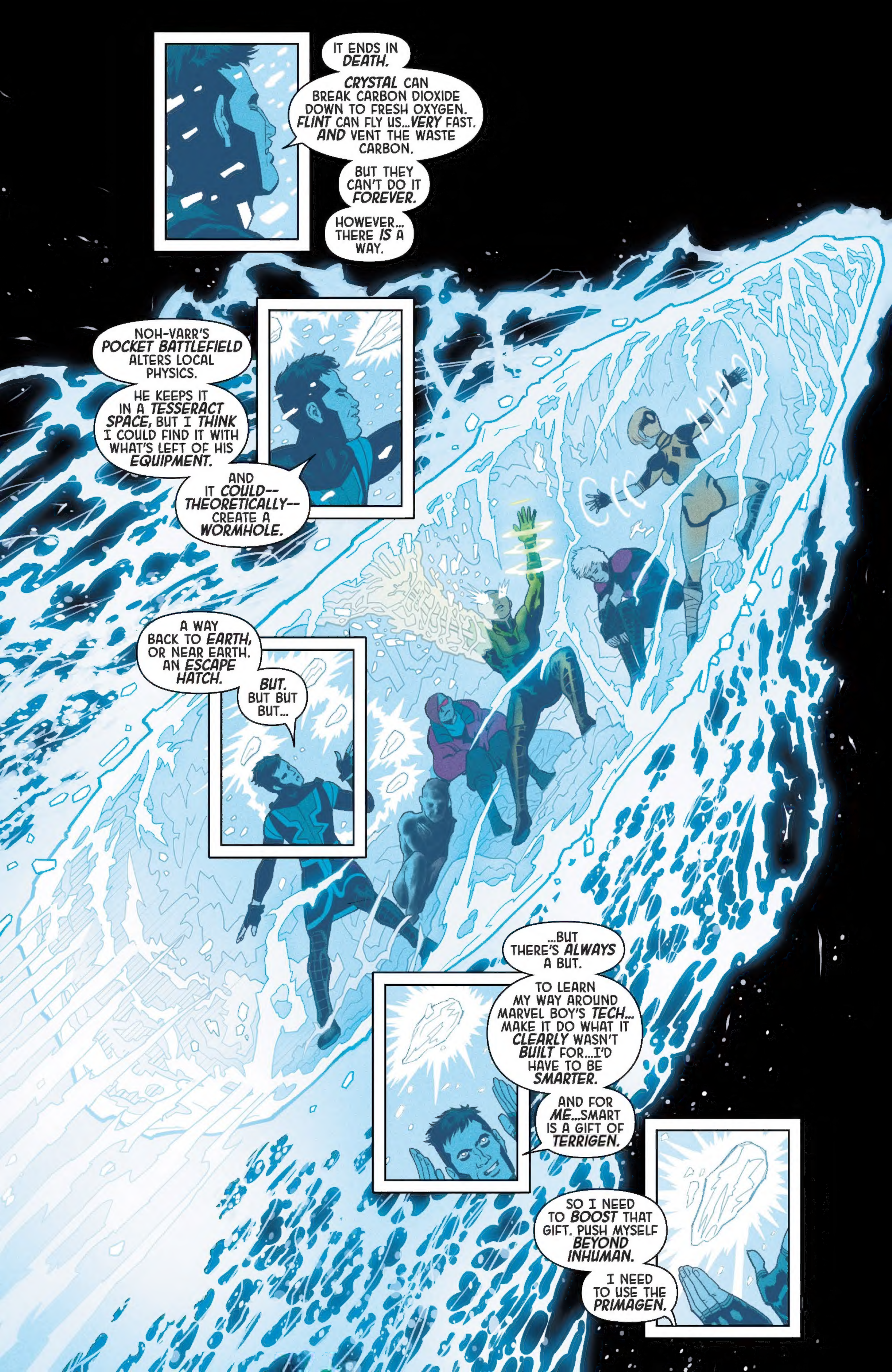


"I KNOW HOW THIS ENDS."

From Kether to Malkuth

AL EWING writer KEVIN LIBRANDA with JAVIER RODRÍGUEZ pencilers
LIBRANDA with ÁLVARO LÓPEZ inkers JOSÉ VILLARRUBIA with JORDIE BELLAIRE colorists

VC's CLAYTON COWLES letterer JAVIER RODRÍGUEZ & ÁLVARO LÓPEZ cover artists SARAH BRUNSTAD assoc. editor
WIL MOSS editor TOM BREVOORT executive editor AXEL ALONSO editor in chief JOE QUESADA chief creative officer
DAN BUCKLEY president ALAN FINE exec. producer INHUMANS created by STAN LEE & JACK KIRBY


IT ENDS IN DEATH.
CRYSTAL CAN BREAK CARBON DIOXIDE DOWN TO FRESH OXYGEN. FLINT CAN FLY US...VERY FAST. AND VENT THE WASTE CARBON.
BUT THEY CAN'T DO IT FOREVER.
HOWEVER... THERE IS A WAY.
NOH-VARR'S POCKET BATTLEFIELD ALTERS LOCAL PHYSICS.
HE KEEPS IT IN A TESSERACT SPACE, BUT I THINK I COULD FIND IT WITH WHAT'S LEFT OF HIS EQUIPMENT.
AND IT COULD-- THEORETICALLY-- CREATE A WORMHOLE.
A WAY BACK TO EARTH, OR NEAR EARTH. AN ESCAPE HATCH.
BUT. BUT BUT BUT...
...BUT THERE'S ALWAYS A BUT.
TO LEARN MY WAY AROUND MARVEL BOY'S TECH... MAKE IT DO WHAT IT CLEARLY WASN'T BUILT FOR...I'D HAVE TO BE SMARTER.
AND FOR ME...SMART IS A GIFT OF TERRIGEN.
SO I NEED TO BOOST THAT GIFT. PUSH MYSELF BEYOND INHUMAN.
I NEED TO USE THE PRIMAGEN.

MAXIMUS--
IT'S FINE, CRYSTAL.
IT'S ALL FINE.

UM.
I PROMISE I WON'T *BETRAY* YOU.

I DON'T CARE.

MAXIMUS-- WHATEVER YOU'RE GOING TO DO, *DO IT*--
...
ALL RIGHT.

HELLO. HELLO, LITTLE PRIMAGEN STONE.
MY PRIMA MATERIA. I'VE *FOUND* YOU.
TEACH ME *EVERYTHING.*

MAXIMUS.

AT LAST... WE MEET.
NNUHH... AAAHH...
TRY NOT TO SCREAM.
I AM MAXIMUS THE MAGE, CALLED THE LAST INHUMAN. I AM YOU. YOU ARE ME.
ONCE, YOUR MIND WAS EXPANDED AND YOU SAW A SMALL GLIMPSE OF EVERY MOMENT OF YOUR LIFE. AND IT DROVE YOU MAD.*
NOW YOU BREATHE IN THE PRIMA MATERIA...THE QUINTESSENCE... AND YOUR MIND EXPANDS AGAIN. AND YOU SEE CLEARLY.
ALL YOUR MEMORIES, PAST AND FUTURE. IN ALL THEIR VARIATIONS AND PERMUTATIONS. EVERYTHING YOU ARE AND HAVE EVER BEEN OR EVER WILL BE...
...FROM YOUR BIRTH...
...TO YOUR DEATH.
WATCH CLOSELY.
*SEE ROYALS #3! --WIL

"THIS IS HOW IT ENDS.

FIVE THOUSAND YEARS FROM NOW.

THIS IS HOW IT ENDS...

YEAH.

"MILLENNIA AGO, THE TYPE FOUR CIVILIZATION WE CALL THE *PROGENITORS* CREATED THE *KREE*--THEIR *EXPERIMENT* IN OUR GALAXY.

"THE KREE, IN TURN, CREATED *US*--THE INHUMANS. A *WRINKLE* IN THE PROGENITORS' ORIGINAL PROJECT.

"THEY TRIED TO FIND OUT MORE ABOUT US--VIA THE *SKYSPEARS*--AND THAT MADE *US* AWARE OF *THEM.*

"SO WE BROKE INTO THEIR *HOUSE* AND STOLE THEIR *STUFF.*

DADDY'S HOME.

AND HE'S *ANGRY.*

"AND THEN WE HAD THEIR *FULL ATTENTION.*

THEY'RE POWERING UP...

AS EXPECTED. WE'RE *LEFTOVERS* TO THEM--

--EXPERIMENTAL BYPRODUCTS TO BE *CLEANSED...*

"THAT'S WHERE *YOU* ARE NOW, PAST-ME.

"FROM *THERE...*

MY LIEGE?

THE ROYAL DINNER IS *SERVED.*

SHRZAKK

"...THINGS *ESCALATED.*

"WE THOUGHT WE WERE *READY.*

"WE THOUGHT THAT EVEN IF THE PROGENITORS FOLLOWED US TO *EARTH...*

"...WE WOULD HOLD THEM *BACK.*

"WE THOUGHT WE *UNDERSTOOD* THEM.

"WHAT THEY WANTED. WHAT THEY *NEEDED.*

BON APPETIT, YOUR MAJESTY.

"LIKE FOOLS... LIKE *HUMAN BEINGS...*

YEAH. GOOD *WORK,* FLINT.

"MOON KING."

WHATEVER YOU'RE CALLING YOURSELF NOW...

YOU EAT YOUR *FILL.* GET *READY.*

I'LL DO *MY* PART.

"...WE THOUGHT IT WAS A MATTER OF *REVENGE.*

"AFTER CENTURIES AS THE DOMINANT SUBSPECIES OF OUR PLANET...AS THE TRUE MONARCHS OF THE EARTH...

THERE WAS *MUSIC* HERE, ONCE.

DIAMONDS MADE OF *SOUND*, CREATED IN THOUGHTSPACE. A FORM OF MAGIC *UNIQUE* TO THIS PLANET.

"...WE HAD NO IDEA HOW *SMALL* WE WERE.

THAT'S IT. LET YOUR ANGER FLOW.

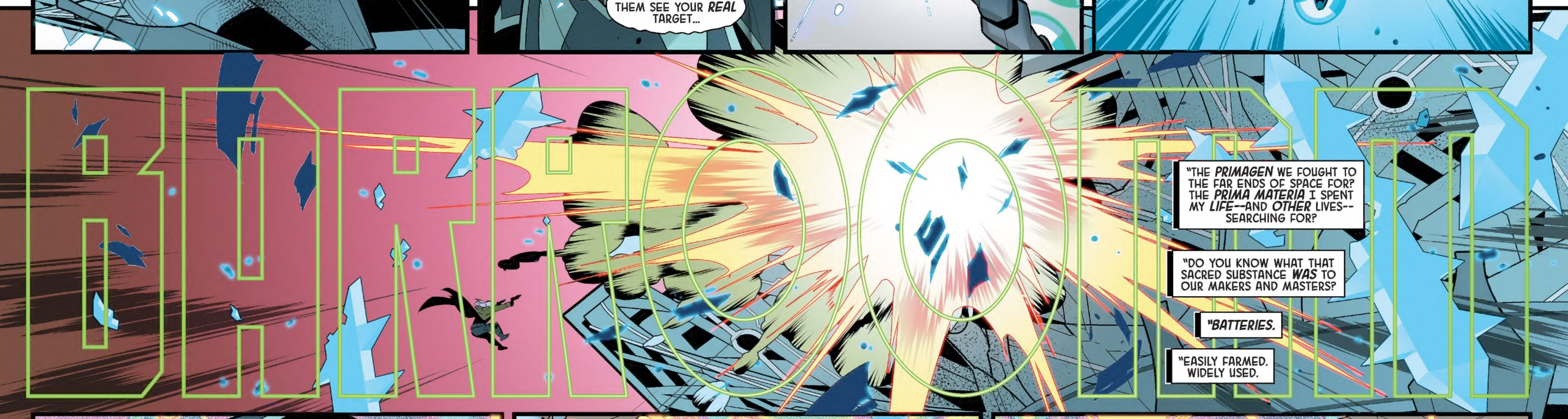
DON'T LET THEM SEE YOUR *REAL* TARGET...

YOU *DESTROYED* THE PLANET. DESTROYED THE *MUSIC*. BUT *I* REMEMBER.

I REMEMBER THE *DRUMS*.

LISTEN!

LISTEN TO THEM!



"ESSENTIALLY *WORTHLESS.*

YES...

YES!

"EVEN THE *PROGENITORS* WE KILLED--THE PLANET WE *MAIMED*--WAS A MINOR *GLITCH* IN THEIR SYSTEM.

FINE WORK, ACCUSER. MISSION *ACCOMPLISHED.*

"IN *HUMAN* TERMS... THEY SIMPLY DIDN'T *CARE.*

KEEP THEM BUSY.

DIE *WELL...*

"WE WERE A QUIRK IN THE RESULTS OF AN OLD *GENETICS PROJECT.*

"WHAT WE DIDN'T *UNDERSTAND*--NOT UNTIL IT WAS *TOO LATE*--WAS WHAT THE PROJECT WAS *FOR.*

YOU STAND *ACCUSED.*

COME OUT AND *FACE* ME--

//END//

"WHEN WE ESCAPED THEM--WHEN WE *BEAT* THEM--THE ONLY REASON THEY CAME *AFTER* US...

OH.

THEY SENT *YOU.*

"...WAS BECAUSE THEY SAW *POTENTIAL.*

PROGENITOR.
COMMANDER-CLASS.

//END THREAT//

...

GO ON, THEN.

"THAT'S *WHY* THEY DO WHAT THEY DO. WHY THEY ALTERED THE *KREE,* AND WHO KNOWS WHO ELSE. THEY'RE LOOKING FOR *POTENTIAL.*

"THE KREE WERE *FAILURES,* IN THE END. THEIR EVOLUTION *STOPPED* BEFORE THEY BECAME *USEFUL.* BUT THEN...THE KREE MADE *US.*

"AND WHEN WE *ATTACKED* THE PROGENITORS AND GOT *AWAY* WITH IT...IT SHOWED THEM A *GAP* IN THEIR KNOWLEDGE. ONE WE COULD *FILL.*

"WE BECAME *USEFUL.*

"AS POTENTIAL *RAW MATERIAL.*

"IT'S *FUNNY,* REALLY. EVERYONE GOT THEIR SECRET WISH.

//ERROR?/ MEMORY?/ DISREGARD//

//END THREAT//

AUUU

UUU

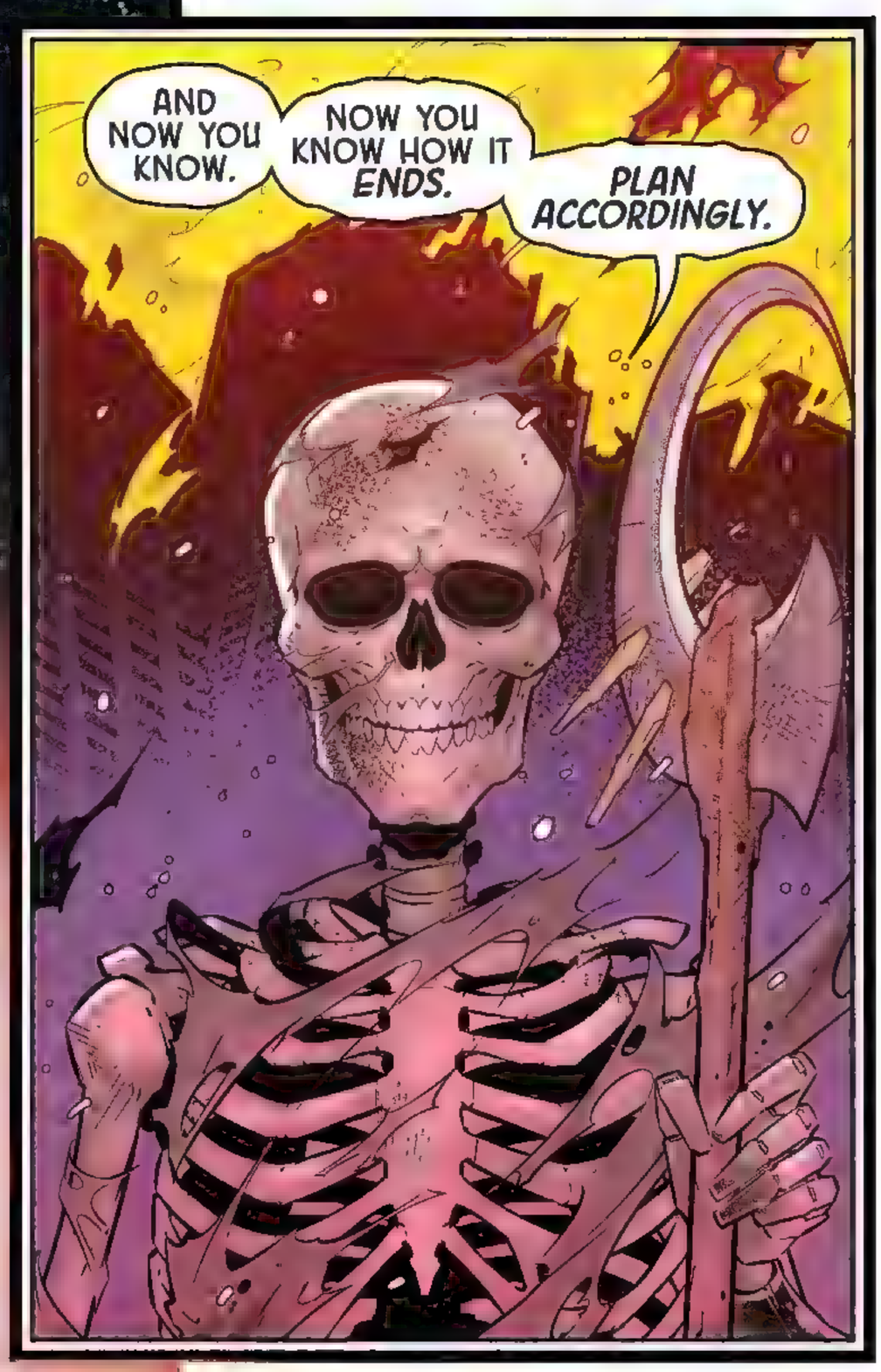
"MEDUSA AND BLACK BOLT ARE *TOGETHER.*

AAUUUUUUUU

"WE DID TRY TO FIGHT BACK. WE MOBILIZED EVERYBODY. WE WENT TO WAR.
"AND WE LOST.
AAARRHHH--
"AND WE DIED.
I'M SO SORRY, NOH. FOR ALL OF IT.
AND...FOR THE SKYSPEAR. I'M SORRY.
I WAS RUDE.
"AND THEY DID WHAT THEY WANTED ANYWAY.
COME ON, DAMN YOU. MY FRIEND JUST DIED BUYING US A CHANCE.
I SAW YOU LAND AROUND HERE--WHERE ARE YOU?
WHERE ARE YOU, YOU MISERABLE LITTLE PIECE OF--
--BEAUTIFUL PRIMAGEN CRYSTAL.
"WHEN THE MOON KING FELL TO EARTH ON THE LAST DAY OF THE WAR--THAT'S WHEN I KNEW.
"WE'D FOUGHT THEM FOR YEARS. WE'D USED UP ALL THE PRIMAGEN WE HAD TURNING OURSELVES INTO ULTIMATE WEAPONS.
"AND THEY'D TURNED MY BROTHER AND SISTER-IN-LAW INTO A HORROR, AND KILLED THE EARTH, AND ALL BUT KILLED OUR KING...
"...AND WE COULDN'T EVEN STOP THEM LEAVING.
"WHEN THE MOON KING FELL, I REALIZED TWO THINGS--
"--I KNEW THAT ONE DAY THEY'D BE BACK.
"AND I KNEW WE COULDN'T FIGHT THEM...

"...IF WE PLAYED BY THE RULES.
MAXIMUS. AT LAST...WE MEET.
"YOU'RE BREATHING IN THE PRIMA MATERIA, AND IT'S ALTERING YOU.
"AS YOU WERE ALTERED IN THE WOMB.
"AS SWAIN AND FLINT AND POOR LOST GORGON WERE ALTERED.
"YOUR LIFESPAN IS BEING EXTENDED DRAMATICALLY. YOUR GIFT--YOUR MIND--IS EXPANDING."
THIS IS THE FIRST STEP TO BECOMING WHAT I AM. BECOMING THE MAGE.
IT IS NOT THE LAST, NOR THE HARDEST.
AND I CANNOT HELP YOU.
"BY INHALING THE PRIMA MATERIA IN MY TIME--BROUGHT TO ME OVER GREAT TIME AND AT GREAT COST--I CAN LET YOU SEE THIS.
"THE REST IS UP TO YOU, I'M AFRAID.
"THAT'S HALF OF WHAT ALL THIS WAS ALL FOR. WHY NOH-VARR AND I CROSSED THE WORLD AND WOKE THE MOON KING FROM HIS ENDLESS SLEEP WHEN WE HEARD THEM COMING.
"WE DID IT TO SPEAK TO YOU..."
...AND TO SPEAK TO THEM.
I KNEW THEY'D BE BACK, YOU SEE.
"HUMANITY DID SO WELL WITH A BASTARDIZED VERSION OF THE EXPERIMENT...THEY HAD TO TRY IT FOR REAL ON WHAT WAS LEFT.
"BUT EARTH WILL NOT BE THEIR PETRI DISH.
"IT WAS NEVER A MATTER OF REVENGE. THE PROGENITORS DON'T UNDERSTAND REVENGE. OR HATE. OR SPITE.
"BUT I...I AM MAXIMUS. THE MAGE. THE MAD.

"AND I DO!"


AND NOW YOU KNOW.
NOW YOU KNOW HOW IT ENDS.
PLAN ACCORDINGLY.

AND TRY NOT TO SCREAM.

AAAAHHH!

FIVE THOUSAND YEARS!
MY THOUGHTS-- SO ORDERED, CRYSTALLINE-- THE MAGE--
MAXIMUS? WHAT ARE YOU--

I TOLD MYSELF EVERYTHING!
I SAW IT ALL! THE FUTURE! THE PROGENITORS!
THE DEATH OF THE EARTH-- OH, RANDAC HELP ME--

YOU'RE NOT MAKING SENSE--
I'M MAKING PERFECT SENSE, "YOUR MAJESTY"! THEY KNOW WHERE WE LIVE!
THEY'RE COMING! AND WE CAN'T FIGHT THEM!

IF WE FIGHT THEM--WE BECOME THEM! PART OF THEIR SYSTEM! THEY TURN US INTO THEM-- I SAW IT!
I SAW IT AND I DON'T KNOW WHAT TO DO--

I DO.

IF THEY'RE COMING FOR US? WE COME FOR THEM FIRST.
IF WE CAN'T FIGHT...WE CHEAT.
THE PROGENITORS ARE NOT OUR GODS. THEY ARE NOT OUR MASTERS.
THEY ARE THE ENEMIES OF THE INHUMAN PEOPLE...
...AND I WILL LAY MY JUDGMENT UPON THEM!
TO BE CONTINUED...IN INHUMANS: JUDGMENT DAY #1!

HOLDING COURT

You hold in your hands the last issue of ROYALS, featuring the end of the "future myth" we started telling 5000 years ago…or twelve issues ago, depending how you're counting. It's goodbye to the Last Inhuman, the Accuser and the Moon King--but the story of their past selves continues, and diverges, in INHUMANS: JUDGMENT DAY, coming this January. There, we'll see how the Inhumans attempt to change their fate and defy the Gods--and we'll also see the reunion between Black Bolt and Medusa, each of them drastically changed by their experiences apart. I can promise that meeting will at least be slightly easier on readers than the "reunion" we saw this issue.

And now that I've told you where to follow the story from here…let's give some thanks.

This has been a very artist-driven book. It was always going to be--you can't really have a eurocomix-influenced far-future quest across a dying Earth take up a chunk of every issue unless you're willing to put yourself in the hands of the artist--so for this, the writing was very much inspired by each different artist's design skills. I hope nobody minds if I pick some favorites.

Jonboy Meyers started us off with a selection of outfits and uniforms--and a spaceship design--that set the slightly otherworldly tone right from the start. I'll remember his Arctillan--particularly the astral ghosts of issue #2--with a special fondness. Then you had the emotional coldness of Agon and Rynda, rendered perfectly by Will Robson, and the hulking mass of Ronan as depicted by Thony Silas, who managed to convey the sorrow lurking under all the power. I'll remember his Ronan, walking through the graveyard planet of Hala, naming the corpses as he went, for a long time to come.

Kevin Libranda designed the Accuser--Noh-Varr's terrible future--bringing a perfect cross between Kree warrior and lonesome cowboy. His clear, clean style and great storytelling made him perfect for swashbuckling fights with the Snarks and the strangeness of the far-future quest, and he's done fantastic work throughout the series, but Gorgon's hairy feet will stay in my mind for a while--as will the wonderfully creepy design for the Progenitor featured in this issue.

Javier Rodriguez was the man responsible for the other Progenitor designs--so good we used them all--which inspired more thoughts about their society and how they operated, which led to more great art from him, which inspired more wild ideas… and so on. Javier's pencils were amazing enough on their own, but when Álvaro López added his amazing inks, they moved to another level. They were the perfect team for these issues, and while there are a lot of perfect moments from his pages, the revelation of the World Farm in #9 is probably the one that'll stick with me longest.

Which brings us to color artists, because without Jordie Bellaire, that scene wouldn't have had half the punch. Jordie, Ryan Kinnaird, Jim Charalampidis and José Villarrubia took already beautiful art and made it sing--all, of course, topped off with the lovely lettering skills of the one, the only, Mr. Clayton Cowles.

And finally, thanks to Wil Moss, Sarah Brunstad and Charles Beacham on the editorial front for letting me take the helm for this voyage--and take things farther out than I ever thought we could go--and, if I can mix a metaphor, for keeping the wheels on the bus.

I hope to see you all on JUDGMENT DAY…and until then, thanks to all of you for reading. As royal families go, I think this one did a lot better than most.

-Al

NEXT: INHUMANS: JUDGMENT DAY!

ZONE